

Schenck Building  
535-37 Arch Street (northeast corner of  
Sixth and Arch Streets)  
Philadelphia  
Philadelphia County  
Pennsylvania

HABS No. PA-1078

HABS  
PA  
51-PHILA,  
264-

PHOTOGRAPHS  
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey  
National Park Service  
Eastern Office, Design and Construction  
143 South Third Street  
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

## HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

HABS No. PA-1078

## SCHENCK BUILDING

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Address: 535-37 Arch Street (northeast corner of Sixth and Arch Streets), Philadelphia, Philadelphia County, Pennsylvania.

Brief Statement of Significance: This cast iron building is a fine example of the commercial architecture in Philadelphia during the last half of the 19th century.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

## A. Physical History

1. Original and subsequent owners: The corner lot was purchased by Joseph H. Schenck in December 1868 and remained in his possession until 1918. No information was obtained regarding the adjoining lot which Schenck must have owned. The property was acquired by the General State Authority in 1954, and was cleared in 1959 for the Independence Mall project.
2. Date of erection: 1869-72. The Philadelphia Directories for the years 1867-71 list Joseph H. Schenck at 15 North Sixth Street. The Directory for 1872 lists Schenck's address at the Northeast corner of Sixth and Arch Streets. It is assumed that the building was erected between 1869 (the purchase date of the lot) and 1872.
3. Architect: Stephen D. Button
4. Sources of information
  - a. Primary and unpublished sources: Philadelphia County (Pennsylvania) Records Department, Philadelphia City Hall. Chain of title extracted from deed books.
  - b. Secondary and published sources: Illustrated Philadelphia: Its Wealth and Industries (New York: American Publishing and Engraving Company, 1889). Article on S. D. Button, Architect, with old view of Schenck Building, p. 152.

## PART II. ARCHITECTURAL DESCRIPTION

### A. General Statement

1. Architectural interest and merit: This cast iron building was a fine example of commercial architecture in Philadelphia during the last half of the 19th century.
2. Condition of fabric: Building demolished in 1959. Prior to the demolition the fabric was in fair condition, the cast iron having deteriorated in spots.

- B. Description of Exterior: The recently demolished one-story building was originally the first floor of the five-and-one-half story structure built between 1869-72 for Joseph H. Schenck, M. D. The upper stories were removed at an unknown date and are documented here by an old view from Illustrated Philadelphia, It's Wealth and Industries (1889). The following architectural description is based in part on this print and in part on data and photographs compiled prior to the demolition of the one-story building in 1959.

The original building was rectangular, five-and-one-half stories (story height diminishes toward the top) with mansard roof punctuated by truncated towers (three on west elevation, the center being the larger, and two on the south elevation--all topped with decorative iron cresting). The west elevation was divided into three large bays (the center being the smaller - defined by the width of the central tower), and the south elevation into two large bays--all with arched windows placed singly or in groups of two or three. The arched dormer windows were arranged in pairs with single windows in each face of the smaller towers, and a large dormer with Palladian motif in the central tower.

The window frames had round or segmental arched heads with foliate decorative keystones.

The first floor had arcaded cast iron facades on the south and west (six bays by thirteen bays) composed of twin engaged columns and pilasters (Corinthian Order set on raised bases) supporting denticulated architrave, twin scroll brackets and projecting cornice. There were brick party walls on the north and east and a low brick parapet (modern addition after removal of the upper stories) above the cornice. There were two doorways in the south elevation and three in the west elevation (placed at the center of each large bay)--single modern glazed double doors with flat-head transoms above, all set in a single arched frame (the original doors were taller with multi-light arched transom above). The windows were set in round or segmental arched openings (with various muntin arrangements) with foliate cast iron grills beneath.

The projecting cast-iron cornice had large cyma-recta molding and showed evidence of the broken scroll pediments originally over the doorways. The roof was flat (covering not determined) with a low brick parapet.

- C. Description of Interiors: Descriptive data for the interior of the building was not obtained.
- D. Site: The building was situated on the northeast corner of Sixth and Arch Streets, a busy urban intersection.

Prepared by John D. Milner, Architect  
National Park Service  
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